UNITED NATIONS ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE FIELD OF DECOLONIZATION AND THE TASK AHEAD

BY SECRETARY-GENERAL BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI [1]

The fact that the [Special] Committee [on Decolonization] continues to welcome new members,[2] more than 30 years after it was established, is striking proof of the importance that Member States continue to attach to the process of decolonization. It also attests to the high regard in which the Committee is held.

The United Nations achievements in the field of decolonization are known and acknowledged the world over. I do not doubt for one minute that the Committee's unremitting efforts on behalf of colonial peoples have done much to ensure that the rights of those peoples to self-determination are respected. Throughout this time, anxious to carry out its mandate, the Committee has periodically considered the situation of the populations of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. It has studied requests and petitions from them. It has sent visiting missions to a number of Territories. In order to mobilize public opinion regarding the question of decolonization, the Committee has also conducted major information and sensitization campaigns. Lastly, it has submitted numerous reports to the General Assembly over the years, not to mention the fact that it has played the role of observer in several referendums on the question of self-determination.

Looking back on what it has accomplished, the Committee can justly be proud of the contribution it has made to what is considered one of the major accomplishments of the United Nations. Of course, today, the passions that the struggles for decolonization once aroused have died down somewhat and we are tempted to regard what has been won with detachment, as if the goals that have been achieved had always been taken for granted. In order to measure how far we have come and how much we have accomplished in 30 years we must, however, remember the struggles and sacrifices, the considerable difficulties that have had to be overcome in order for millions of people to accede to independence and self-determination. Let us remember, for instance, the dramatic events which Africa and South-East Asia have had to deal with during this period.

Although the results that have been achieved after 30 years are significant, much still remains to be done. Some populations have not yet had an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. They are essentially the populations of the islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Although the political map of the world has changed in recent years, and although the process of decolonization is no longer a source of immense conflicts, the Committee's work is not yet done. In this area, as in others, the principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations remain the rule that must be followed and enforced.

It is up to the world Organization to see to the well-being of the populations of the last remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. It is up to it to make sure that they fully exercise their right to choose their future freely, in accordance with the principles of the Charter and with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

In this connection, the General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed that such factors as territorial size, size of population and geographical location should in no way be an impediment to the exercise of the inalienable right to self-determination.

Among the regions of the word where the question of decolonization remains topical, the

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[1] Excerpts from a statement made by the Secretary-General on 10 February 1993 as he opened the 1993 session of the Special Committee on Decolonization.

[2] Grenada and the Czech Republic.

Western Sahara continues to be of concern to the international community.

In this regard, I am pursuing the work of my predecessor, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar. As indicated in the reports that I have regularly submitted to the Security Council, which continues to consider the matter, I have endeavoured to iron out the difficulties that could hinder the implementation of the settlement plan, which provides for the organization and holding by the United Nations of a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara. I have spoken several times with all the interested parties, and my Special Representative for Western Sahara has made several trips to the region for the purpose of consultations and dialogue. My most recent report to the Council takes stock of the situation and proposes a number of options for overcoming the current deadlock.

Apart from the Western Sahara, most Non-Self-Governing Territories are small islands with similar physical characteristics. However, for various reasons, the political, economic and social situations differ from one Territory to another. That is to say that each Territory is a specific case requiring specific solutions. The good results that the Special Committee has so far achieved are a promising sign that it will be able to suggest viable solutions to the problems of these Territories and help them to choose their future freely.

In this regard, the Plan of Action adopted by the General Assembly for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism is both a framework and an instrument that should make it possible to measure progress achieved in this area.

Nevertheless, in order to achieve the desired results, the efforts of the United Nations must have the support of the administering Powers whose cooperation is essential. Their cooperation in providing the United Nations with accurate and recent information on the Territories that they administer is indispensable. Their cooperation is also required when United Nations visiting missions are sent to those Territories.

Without the political good will of the administering Powers, without their interest in preparing the Territories concerned for decolonization, the Territories are likely to face serious problems. That is why it is essential to ensure the training of personnel and technicians. That is why, generally speaking, it is essential to guarantee, as far as possible, conditions for the satisfactory economic development of these Territories.

As I emphasized last year, the major changes that have taken place at the international level have enabled the parties concerned to strengthen this cooperation. I should like to repeat that your efforts have been highly commendable, and you can always rely on my support.

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